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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [BG](#) [GM](#)  
SUBJECT: BULGARIA ACTIVELY SEEKS DISCUSSION ON HOSTING OF  
U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE ASSETS

Classified By: Political M/C George Glass for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (S) Begin summary. During a February 6 meeting on the margins of the Munich Security Conference, Bulgarian FM Nickolay Mladenov told U/S Tauscher that Bulgaria stands ready to discuss the hosting of any part of the U.S./NATO missile defense system on its territory. He further proposed sending a team of Bulgarian experts to Washington to discuss possible options. In order not to raise expectations, Mladenov said the trip could be kept out of the eye of the public. Mladenov also reassured Tauscher that, within the EU, Bulgaria intended to take a tough position on Iran sanctions and inquired about ways to both boost U.S.-Bulgarian relations and better institutionalize cooperation. End summary.

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Hosting of MD assets in Bulgaria  
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12. (S) Mladenov underscored -- in very clear terms -- that his government stood ready to discuss the hosting of any part of the U.S./NATO missile defense system in Bulgaria. He further emphasized that this message came directly from his Prime Minister. U/S Tauscher thanked Mladenov for that support and emphasized that the USG had only made a decision on the interceptors in Romania and that the move should in no way be taken as a negative assessment of Bulgaria as a host for other elements of the architecture. In response to Mladenov's inquiries about additional opportunities for Bulgaria, Tauscher noted that the USG still needed to identify locations for other parts of the Phased Adaptive Approach, including sensors -- though we would still need time to refine our thinking on next steps. Mladenov offered to provide any technical information that the U.S. might need to help the decision-making process and expressed Bulgaria's desire to have bilateral discussions on missile defense as soon as possible. U/S Tauscher underscored the need to manage expectations and expressed concern that any visit by her to Sofia might fuel speculation that an offer on missile defense cooperation with Bulgaria was imminent. Mladenov agreed and offered to send a technical team to Washington instead. Tauscher said the USG would need a few weeks to assess the way forward but welcomed Mladenov's idea -- suggesting, perhaps, a team visit in the spring. Mladenov promised to keep in close contact and noted that he would keep Bulgaria's missile defense portfolio despite his recent move from Defense Minister to Foreign Minister.

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NATO-izing MD  
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13. (C) Tauscher emphasized the need for political help to win over NATO partners who remain put off by the high cost of missile defense. She added that we should press hard to include a discussion -- and statement -- on the importance of territorial defense at the NATO Summit in Lisbon. Though the USG is committed to "NATO-izing" missile defense, Tauscher noted that the expensive sticker price -- combined with NATO's current budget woes -- meant that the system would remain a largely U.S.-funded program for the immediate future. Nevertheless, the USG wanted to secure NATO funding for an MD architecture study.

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Iran  
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14. (C) According to Mladenov, Bulgaria had great concern over continuing developments in Iran's nuclear program and had come to the conclusion that MD was important for Europe -- as both a defense mechanism and as a tangible commitment to NATO Article 5 guarantees. With regard to Iran, Mladenov stated that the Bulgarian government had put all cooperation with Tehran -- including economic and non-governmental engagement -- on hold. He added that Bulgaria intended to take a tough line in favor of EU sanctions. However, during this process, Bulgaria would need to refrain from making comments on Iranian human rights issues as a result of a delicate Bulgarian-citizen arrest case in Iran.

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#### Bilateral Relations -----

15. (SBU) Mladenov emphasized that he wanted to "dust the cobwebs" off of U.S./Bulgarian relations and proposed to send an informal note to the State Department outlining ideas for closer cooperation in foreign affairs and defense. Most importantly, Mladenov wanted to institutionalize cooperation beyond top-level engagement and deeper into the government apparatus -- though the proposal would not require formal yearly meetings. Tauscher offered to also develop a list of ideas over the next few weeks and suggested that hosting a regional meeting in Bulgaria could be a good first project.

#### ----- Training in Bulgaria -----

16. (C) In closing, Mladenov inquired about additional ways to use the Novo Selo military base in Bulgaria. Specifically, he suggested that the site could be used for training of Operational and Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs) for Afghanistan.

17. (U) This cable was cleared with U/S Tauscher.  
Delawie